

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 SAJ-01 OMB-01 TRSE-00 AID-05 IO-13 /088 W
-----132028Z 033334 /41

R 131853Z JAN 77
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9465
INFO AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

C O N F I D E N T I A L LONDON 00635

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, UK, IN
SUBJECT: CONTROVERSY IN UK OVER ANTI-MRS. GANDHI
ARTICLES

REF: 76 NEW DELHI 14833

1. LAST WEEK SAW ANOTHER IN THE SERIES OF PUBLIC
DEBATES IN BRITISH MEDIA AND POLITICS OVER MRS. GANDHI'S
ASSUMPTION OF EMERGENCY POWERS IN INDIA. THE CONTRO-
VERSY WAS TRIGGERED BY TWO LENGTHY, DETAILED, AND
LEGALISTIC ARTICLES BY BERNARD LEVIN, A PROMINENT
OOLEMICAL WRITER, IN THE TIMES ON JANUARY 5 AND 6, IN
WHICH HE VERY STRONGLY CRITICIZED MRS. GANDHI'S MOST
RECENT LEGISLATION. LEVIN CONCLUDED HIS SECOND ARTICLE
WITH THE SENTENCE, "THE TRUTH IS THAT MRS. GANDHI WANTS
TO BE A DICTATOR, AND IS GOING TO BE".

2. THE EVENING OF JANUARY 6, MICHAEL FOOT, LEADER OF
THE HOUSE OF COMMONS AND THE SECOND RANKING MEMBER OF
THE LABOR CABINET, GAVE A SPEECH AT THE INDIA LEAGUE IN
LONDON IN WHICH HE DESCRIBED THAT PARTICULAR LAST
SENTENCE OF LEVIN'S AS "A MONSTROUS LIE". FOOT WENT ON
TO EXPRESS "OUR DEEP ANXIETY ABOUT THE SUSPENSION OF
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VARIOUS CIVIL LIBERTIES" IN INDIA, AND TO ADVOCATE THE
RESTORATION OF THOSE LIBERTIES AND THE HOLDING OF FREE
ELECTIONS. HOWEVER, HE ALSO SAID "WE SHOULD RECOGNIZE
WHAT WERE THE CONDITIONS IN INDIA PRIOR TO THE DECLARA-
TION OF THE EMERGENCY" AND GAVE MRS. GANDHI QUALIFIED
SUPPORT. HE CONCLUDED: "MY GUESS, AND MINE MAY BE
BETTER THAN MR. LEVIN'S, IS THAT THE VAST MAJORITY OF

INDIAN PEOPLE ARE GLAD" OF THE COURSE CHOSEN BY MRS. GANDHI, AND THAT HER DEPARTURE FROM THE INDIAN SCENE AT THIS PERIOD "WOULD HAVE BEEN A TRAGEDY FOR THE INDIAN PEOPLE".

3. FOOT'S REMARKS DREW CRITICISM FROM THE LIBERAL GUARDIAN IN AN EDITORIAL ON JANUARY 8; FROM AT LEAST ONE MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FROM FOOT'S OWN PARTY, JOHN LEE; AND FROM THE FORMER MAYOR OF DELHI, KIDAR SAHANI, NOW A POLITICAL REFUGEE IN LONDON. SAHANI EXTENDED HIS ATTACK ON MRS. GANDHI TO HSI SON SANJAY, ALLEGING THAT SHE HAD ESTABLISHED A "DYNASTIC DICTATORSHIP" WITH THE UNPOPULAR SANJAY AS HER SUCCESSOR.

4. AS AN FCO OFFICER WORKING ON SOUTH ASIAN AFFAIRS POINTED OUT TO EMBOFF, FOOT WAS SPEAKING PURELY PERSONALLY AND NOT AS A SPOKESMAN FOR THE GOVERNMENT OR THE LABOR PARTY. HOWEVER, IT IS NOTEWORTHY THAT NOBODY IN THE CABINET HAS DISAVOWED OR OTHERWISE COMMENTED ON HIS SPEECH. FOOT'S ATTITUDE REFLECTS A NOSTALGIC SENTIMENT FOR INDIA'S ATTAINMENT OF INDEPENDENCE AMONG THE OLDER MEMBERS OF THE LABOR PARTY WHO CAMPAIGNED FOR IT IN THEIR YOUTH. FOR A DESCRIPTION OF FOOT'S VISIT TO INDIA LAST OCTOBER. SEE NEW DELHI REFTEL.

5. TEXTS OF THE ARTICLES REFERRED TO IN THIS MESSAGE ARE BEING POUCHED TO EMBASSY NEW DELHI, NEA/INS, AND INR/RNA.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRESS COMMENTS, PRIME MINISTER, POLITICAL SITUATION, ALLEGATIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 13-Jan-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977LONDON00635
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770013-0957
Format: TEL
From: LONDON
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770156/aaaabwji.tel
Line Count: 99
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: a91605da-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 NEW DELHI 14833
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 07-Mar-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3607922
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CONTROVERSY IN UK OVER ANTI-MRS. GANDHI ARTICLES
TAGS: PFOR, UK, IN, (GANDHI, INDIRA)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/a91605da-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009